

# KING JANE GERMANY

Jakob Zaaiman



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**POEMS**

**JAKOB ZAAIMAN**



**LONDON**



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# Rubberface

What will get rid of you ? What could ?

Nothing, apparently.

Long-lived and indestructible.

Turns out she's a fighter, not a self-pitying cry baby,  
the sort of woman who would moan about aches  
and pains, and things not working out  
just the way she wanted.

And you'll not get through that metal vest of herself  
solely by vicious insults

flung like tennis balls at a wall, no,

they'll bounce off her like

joke dog turds off a clown.

Making her the topic of your

poisonous conversation

makes her think you're paying her a compliment.

Bide your time, wait your turn,

it's a funny old world,

said Margaret Thatcher

when she crashed down to earth, big time.

Yes it's a funny old world.

Then, one day, once upon a funny old time,

someone else, not even you,

not even me, none of the above,

helpfully,

mentions a wheelchair.

Don't worry, they said, we'll get you a wheelchair.



And we'll wheel you around in it.

Those wheels, those horrible  
wheelchair wheels and spokes,  
wheels of a horribly modified medical instrument,  
a nightmare shopping trolley, a mobile pre-coffin,  
those horrible double wheeled wheels,  
inner wheel to wheel the wheel,  
and the outer for you to push, or pull, or something,  
so as to inch yourself horribly jerkily forward.  
Then that bastard special rubber,  
that snake tongued 'thiththth' of wheelchair rubber  
on polished hospital floors,  
a horrible hiss of loss, diminution and reduction,  
wholly confirming invalidity, disablement,  
the loss of face;  
shawl over swollen knees, ankles, hiding horrible  
rotten-leggedness.

There you go.  
Images of Napoleon, Stalin, Hitler, Churchill,  
Thatcher, laid low, having to lie  
on a hospital gurney, lying on their back,  
covered only in a flimsy see-through plastic sheet,  
essentially naked, people staring at your privates,  
giggling kids giggling  
while being wheeled up and down the  
streets of Covent Garden, past the designer shops  
and on to the Freemasons Lodge  
and then back again, back down

to the Royal Opera House,  
getting in people's way, making a  
horrible fucking nuisance of yourself,  
getting stuck in shop doorways,  
blocking the pavement, blocking their passage,  
with your passage blocked,  
and dignity lost, status destroyed, authority gone.  
People gawping, staring, giggling, loss of dignity.

So that's what did it.  
Gone in no time.  
Dead in a matter of months, of a vicious stroke.  
Don't worry, you can go to London,  
because we'll get you a wheelchair, and then  
we'll wheel you about in it.  
Spend a penny for the guy,  
get a penny for the doll.

[I don't know if this is exactly what happened,  
or if this is the precise course of events:  
or who spoke to who,  
if any of them ever did.  
But I remember the wheelchair,  
and the stroke  
and the death.  
I didn't make them up.  
I'm sure it happened exactly like I said it did.]

# Firebreak

Glass can be hazardous,  
and can get in the way  
of whatever it is  
you have in mind.

So when you punch your hand through a window,  
believing you were reaching out  
to the latch on the other side,  
which you could clearly see through  
the glass in front of you, you  
could effectively be committing suicide  
by accident.

Those wrists  
now properly bandaged  
by a nurse; but  
now you have to explain  
convincingly to others  
what really happened  
to those wrists.  
Not so easy.

Reaching through the window,  
by way of a sharp kitchen knife, to  
put an end to  
whatever it was that was  
bothering you, because  
you forgot your keys, and

didn't know how else  
to get inside out.

## Devanagari script

It was no more than a trace  
I heard being told in a lowered voice  
to somebody else, and told to them  
only in passing.

So here we have a well-to-do couple,  
deeply respectable,  
and respectably aged but not infirm,  
living in comfortable retirement,  
hosting a dinner party  
- one of many -  
and wanting of course to present their guests  
with something both pleasantly  
reassuring yet reassuringly special,  
say roast chicken with a sprig of  
something special on the side, rosemary perhaps, or  
something even more interestingly special,  
whatever that might be, I'm no cook.

Our elderly couple lived near a golf course,  
with the golf course bordering groves of trees,  
making it almost country living,  
inviting long healthy striding walks  
with a walking stick and dogs running ahead;  
and with the trees and open fairways  
giving you a sense of not being  
hemmed in by other people at all.

Fairways, and wild flowers, and  
mushrooms in season.  
Say roast chicken with a sprig of  
something on the side,  
say wild mushrooms in season,  
if mushrooms have a season,  
maybe they do, I wouldn't know.

So car doors closing, and the front doorbell ringing,  
and greetings and friendliness  
with light drinks and sherry and  
conviviality rising to pleasant and  
educated conversation,  
leavened with cyclical party laughter.  
And then the food, whatever it was,  
say roast chicken  
with a sprig of something special on the side,  
in this case golf course woodland mushrooms  
picked locally, picked by hand,  
handpicked with this very dinner in mind.

Then a horrible sudden and unforeseen madness  
with a violent thrashing and trashing  
of the big front room,  
involving the breaking of furniture  
and the smashing of windows  
and the throwing of books and  
vases at one another,  
and the destruction of artworks  
and the scrawling of

‘cunt’ and ‘pig’ and ‘kill’  
on the walls,  
and a shouting and ranting and waving  
at the hundreds of terrible phantoms  
raging all around about them,  
their elderly naked bodies covered  
in excrement and chicken vomit,  
in a total desecration of  
everything that is holy and comfortable  
and reassuring about  
sports coats and expensive cardigans  
and retired faces  
beaming gently from beneath  
elegantly combed grey hair,  
but there you go.

## At time, on tune

We parted on bad terms, Grandad and I.  
He wasn't a blood relation, more of an in-law,  
but he was 'Grandad'  
to all of us all the same.  
And one evening around suppertime he and I  
had an argument and I  
had threatened – in a manner of speaking –  
to punch him,  
which forced him into  
manly posturing which  
could only end with someone  
- ie Grandad -  
having to back down, humiliatingly.  
And all about rubbing a dog's nose in its piss  
to train it, Pavlov-style, B.F. Skinner-mode,  
CBT-method,  
not to piss that way again.  
So I said that if, for example, I came up to him  
and simply punched him in the face,  
would he know exactly what not to do  
whatever it was he had done  
that I didn't like,  
ever again ?  
Would he feel properly trained ?  
There and then, forevermore ?  
How easy is it to train stupid fucking human beings  
by rubbing their noses in a piss-punch ?  
Would they straightaway get the point ?



This made him feel the need to threaten  
to punch me in return,  
and so he did a little dance, running on the spot,  
and hefting his knees up to his waist  
exaggeratedly  
as if planning to thunder towards me  
and break my face.  
Neither of us moved, so nothing happened -  
the knee-lifts came to an end, and he turned away.  
In the bigger picture  
none of this mattered, as neither of us  
would need the other  
for anything practically meaningful  
ever again.

Then, not long after that incident,  
a kind of confusion set in:  
there was no room for him  
where he was going, so I was asked  
'can Grandad stay with you ?'  
In principle yes, but there was no room here either,  
so he never arrived at my door, but  
I think the idea took hold that  
I had said I didn't want him.  
Not true, but what can you do when  
there's this kind  
of a misunderstanding ?

Years passed, and many years later,  
Grandad died.

He was in his mid-eighties by then, so although  
I felt the customary momentary  
sense of emptiness and loss,  
there was not much else to feel.  
I remembered our standoff, and  
wondered whether  
it would have been altogether better  
had I had not threatened him.  
(Answer: yes.)

Then by a convoluted set of circumstances  
one day I was handed, without explanation,  
a bag of nearly new clothes  
- plaid shirt, pyjamas, a couple of Lacostes –  
all in good condition – and asked if I wanted them.  
Why not, I said, looking into the bag.  
It turned out they were Grandad's cast offs -  
things bought for him while he was in  
his old folks' dementia home - and  
hardly worn, nearly new, and freshly washed.  
Problem was, someone  
had scrawled his name in biro -  
together with a room number - on all the labels,  
grimly illustrating his final captivity and  
debasement.  
Keith, room 33.

So the question is, how long after someone has  
died can you wear their clothes without  
sensing their dead presence next to

your skin ? Sure,  
Lee Miller took a bath in Hitler's tub after  
the liberation of Munich, with  
her pink arse cheeks sliding along  
in exactly the places where Adolf put his,  
but I honestly couldn't  
take a bath in Hitler's place even today,  
even if I knew he always had Blondi pissing  
about in the water with him.  
I doubt I could even take a casual leak in  
Dolf's Nazi porcelain pan without my  
blood running cold.

However:  
Grandad's clothes are still  
in a drawer waiting for me  
to wear them, when  
the time is right, which  
may well never come. The shirts  
perhaps, but the pyjama bottoms, with  
the thought of his dead balls  
rubbing up against mine, doubtful.

And it's those godawful  
biro scrawls on the labels which are  
messing with my mind,  
and teaching me how to be a  
very good doggie.

# Flightpath

At an unexpected point when I  
was in my mid-teens,  
my 'Aunt Jane' - then in her mid-fifties -  
- and a determinedly imperious woman  
who had positioned herself  
right at the summit of our  
sprawling family hierarchy -  
suddenly took a 'turn'.  
Meaning that she had been struck down,  
brought to a halt,  
and her regal bright lights turned off.  
She didn't die - nobody thought she would -  
but she became  
bodily incapacitated, and existentially diminished,  
and strangely silly of speech.  
There was talk of a 'heart attack'.  
But in those days, everything  
unforeseen and catastrophically physical  
used to be called a 'heart attack'.

Fair enough.  
But knowing her as I did,  
it began to dawn on me that, on reflection  
- whatever the medical explanation -  
what had really happened was that  
she had destroyed herself in  
a fit of apoplectic rage,  
brought on by her all-consuming

irritation and anger at  
the total inadequacy  
- the sheer confounding uselessness -  
of the rest of us, especially  
people like her good-for-nothing only son  
- a failed poet banished not only to Australia,  
but to the outback near Alice Springs -  
and people like me,  
an unsightly bohemian who managed  
to ruin everything by  
his very existence;  
and then people like her home help,  
who was apparently unable ever to clean  
even the least household trinket  
properly.

At a stroke, you could say,  
apoplexy had reduced her from being  
haughty and entitled and confidently judgmental  
- an empress of sorts -  
to being no more than just another  
undeclared parasite,  
wholly dependent on others  
not only for basic goodwill  
(and food and lodging)  
but also for the very words  
she struggled to remember  
when she wanted to tell us the  
emptiest of nothings.

And in the last few months before she died,  
- two decades after she had taken  
to her royal bedchamber for good -  
her distinguished husband confided  
(over the phone)  
to their distinguished Harley Street doctor,  
that, as she lay there staring irritably at us,  
Empress Jane had been doing lots of  
'little farts'.

And over the weeks  
leading up to the very end,  
whenever she was presented with  
her lunchtime tray of mashed food  
and mushed fruit  
- the only sustenance suitable  
for an aspirin-ravaged  
and surgically foreshortened gut -  
she would straight away grab her metal soup spoon  
and straight away begin banging the side  
of her porcelain plate  
ting ting ting ting  
over and over again,  
ting ting ting.

One of her sisters,  
herself a practicing psychiatrist,  
listening to the steady tinging ringing  
coming from the room upstairs  
asked, somewhat wistfully,

'Mmm...I wonder what Jane means by that,  
I wonder what she's getting at...  
with that ting ting ting.'

Well, it's not that hard  
to work out.

What Aunt Jane meant was that  
she could sense the presence  
of an approaching meat waggon  
- Dracula black and forbidding -  
destined to park itself right outside her window,  
and probably right up next to her bed;  
but that she hoped that if she could just pretend  
that it was only a little kiddies' fire engine,  
or maybe just a kiddies' ice cream van,  
maybe the whole unspoken truth  
about those little farts,  
and about what her regal existence  
had amounted to,  
would just quietly go away.

# Mr Strawberry

One day I was sitting on a bench in my garden  
- noetically uncertain as usual, yet at peace -  
when I heard only a few yards away,  
and coming from the kitchen  
an almost imperceptible and distinctively muffled  
unheard of sounding sound  
resembling something like a kind of internal collage  
of a weirdly staccato turbulent non-turbulence;  
hopefully but not conclusively  
expressing ineffability, transcendental permanence  
and an omniscient sublimity  
- that last a word I'm never quite  
certain the meaning of -  
and I straightaway asked myself, do these  
supremely recondite conceptualisations (?)  
come with associated sound files, and if so,  
how best to align with them ?

Smoke all that if you want to; or, better still,  
if you can.

So I crept into the kitchen to investigate  
- on tiptoe of course, how else, Jesus -  
and lo and behold !  
I was stunned to be presented with  
nothing less than a blindingly luminous  
all-encompassing blinding vision  
of the Virgin Mary, Holy Mother of God,



Theotokos, herself resplendent in  
some kind of elegant chiffon dressing gown,  
or smoking jacket, with  
her arms outstretched  
in sin-diminishing benediction !  
And surrounded by adoring saints and apostles,  
all masculine !  
Blistering barnacles !  
Beat that, all you guys !  
Fortunately I had the presence of mind  
to grab my Canon digital SLR  
off the counter near the fridge  
so as not only to record the scene for posterity,  
but cunningly also to silence  
- for once and for all -  
the any and many certain doubting  
John Thomases I knew  
would soon be casting doubt on  
the authenticity and veracity of my vision.  
Yes I know a crappy old SLR is not the best thing  
for recording abstruse and occult sounds,  
but I wasn't planning on recording the sounds,  
I was all about capturing the vision,  
and consigning to aspic  
- I mean amber -  
a veritable visible visitation  
of the Virgin Mary.

Moments later

- Mary herself having vacated the premises

and me left trembling with emotion -  
I transferred the images  
to my computer, and to my great relief  
discovered that they were exactly  
as I had witnessed them,  
accurate down to the very last  
minute and specific detail.  
(Although it appears her hands  
were clasped together in soulful prayer  
rather than in the benedictive manner  
I described above.)

I hurriedly emailed a clutch of jpegs to a gaggle of  
Christian and Catholic friends of mine,  
for their delectation, confirmation,  
and of course conclusive  
vindication verification.  
Surprisingly, many did not even bother  
to reply to me  
- brutally underlining the essential  
Nietzschean self-centredness  
of selfless Christianity -  
though I did get a seemingly germane response  
from an Abbess of an enclosed, silent  
and discalced order  
- and supposedly a tattooed Auschwitz  
rape survivor to boot -  
who both thanked me for  
the interesting e-epistle, yet  
felt obliged to point out that

the female figure in the centre  
of my digitally mystical image,  
- though radiant in a filigree gold negligée,  
and heavily beset by various  
eschatological trinkets and goblets -  
- and all these particulars as clear to the eye  
as a church bell - was not  
the Virgin Mary at all  
but rather Queen Christina of Sweden, or  
Princess Something-the-Other  
of Russian Prussia, or  
some other such minor historical figure  
or pop singer and do-gooder  
and definitely nowhere near as valuable  
in salvific terms, as  
the Virgin M.  
So forget about it, she implied. Go fish, wanker.

And, she went on,  
the figures of the attendant men and boys  
- to a man adorned in luxuriant frippery -  
standing and kneeling in worshipful postures  
either side of our now  
well-defrocked prissy missy hussy pussy  
were clearly not  
St Peter and Jesus and God and Moses  
and Hitler, Stalin and Mao  
as I had idiotically concluded  
but were rather worthless courtiers  
and bucket-boys

from some piffling royal household  
like that of the Doge Culo of Cadiz, or  
the Maharaja Lingam of Venice,  
and so in all honesty were complete and utter  
nobodies in any devotional hierarchy.  
No need to consult the Vatican on this,  
the nun added helpfully.

Right, well, yes, nothing I can do about all that.  
Shafted by the clergy, yet again. (!)  
But you can't take anything away  
from the fact that I saw and heard  
these difficult and challenging and  
tenebrous things  
in my own bastard Ikea kitchen  
with my own two eyes, and I  
even have the photos –  
in hard copy, no less - to prove it.  
So you can fuck well off  
with your Vatican.

# Operation Alphabet

Whenever  
you called on him  
unexpectedly  
in his rented room  
on a hot summer's afternoon  
during our student years, you  
would find him lying on the bed  
totally naked, and totally  
fast asleep.

Nothing wrong with that:  
a hot day, a hot afternoon,  
the sun blazing,  
what else to do  
when you've nothing else to do.

And when  
I dropped in on him unexpectedly  
in his cottage in the mountains  
early one afternoon around lunchtime,  
I found the place in darkness,  
with all the curtains closed, and  
the man himself asleep  
on a couch in the front room,  
his face creased and swollen,  
and his expression bewildered.

It took me years to  
wake up to the fact that  
behind the scenes

he had been fast asleep all along,  
all the time, whatever the occasion,  
despite his having told me, repeatedly,  
- whenever I complained about an everyday  
'theological' conundrum, such as  
just how deeply shit life always is -  
'there is always sleep.'  
Sleeping purposefully, determinedly.  
Sleeping for pleasure.  
Sleeping through pain.  
Sleeping for life.  
Sleeping for a pleasurably determined  
pain-free life.

Jesus told us to 'stay awake', but no one  
has any idea what he meant. He  
was very angry with his disciples,  
who just wanted to crash through his whole  
godawful stupid crucifixion,  
- start to finish -  
and who can blame them.  
Which is presumably exactly  
what my friend's plan would have been:  
wake me when  
the whole cosmic nightmare is over.  
Wake me when having to endure  
all this 'stupid fucking life stuff'  
- and for what ? -  
is no longer necessary.  
Let someone else

- an ayatollah (?) - a politician (?)
  - a social worker (?) - the police (?) -
- do the staying awake.

(Matthew 11:3)

## Paper mirror

Lunchtime, and John  
arrived at the dining room late as usual, long  
after the dinner bell had been rung.  
And on a Saturday  
- when this kind of thing took place -  
he would shuffle up to the dining room door,  
grab on to its wooden frame,  
fix his eyes on his chair at the head of the table  
and then move unsteadily towards it,  
desperately keen to reach safety before possibly  
tumbling forward on to the carpet.  
His grim deliberation meant  
he had been drinking all morning,  
and was by now  
well beyond reach.

John liked to lie about his age.  
He used to tell us over the years  
that he was 'about' forty-four,  
when in fact he was nearer sixty-five.  
Truth is he looked nearer eighty,  
thanks to his ravaged face,  
and the blood-pressured crimson glow that  
tends to assert itself about the skull of  
the chronic heavy drinker.

In the evenings, and on weekends, poor old John  
would be in his upstairs room on his own, quietly



putting it away, quietly  
detaching himself from the known universe.  
He liked to say that, being unmarried,  
and not having anything to do in his spare time,  
'there is absolutely no future in my not drinking'.

And that afternoon,  
as he grappled  
- in an unsettling effort at pretending to be sober –  
with the salami and salad spread out on his plate,  
a large housefly  
- one of those big black bristling brutes -  
began circling his glistening forehead.

We all stopped to watch.  
Sooner or later  
he would have to respond, even if,  
as was obviously the case,  
he was too far gone to know  
either what was happening,  
or what to do about it,  
so leaving the fly  
- with its absurdist buzzing -  
free to land on his face  
anywhere and anytime  
it wanted.

But as we looked on,  
this bastard fly  
- very suddenly and unexpectedly -

and as if clobbered by a unseen hand,  
dropped directly on to the middle of John's plate,  
- right next to the lumps of meat John was  
attempting to negotiate -  
and, after turning on its side,  
and twitching its legs a few times,  
lay quite still.

'John !' shouted Ginny,  
- his anorexic girlfriend seated opposite -  
but John had already decided that  
whatever was going on,  
and whatever it was all supposed to mean,  
was best ignored,  
and should not be dignified  
in any way.

We waited.

After a while John looked up, and  
gesturing at the fly with his knife,  
said slowly and decisively:  
'Right. I'm going to leave that.  
I'm going to leave that just as it is.'  
And he went back  
to struggling with his food.  
It was his way of explaining that,  
whatever had happened,  
was - in reality -  
some kind of intentional act against him,  
and a clear instance of

cosmic malice.

So he wasn't going to tamper with  
the evidence.

He would let everyone  
see the truth of it for themselves,  
sitting right there,  
right in the middle of his plate.  
It can and will and does make sense  
if you know  
how to apply the necessary filters  
to be able to think this way.  
John was ahead of us,  
and we all just needed  
to catch up with him.

## Quiet, with shoelace

Something wrong with Roland.  
Although a big handsome square-jawed army man  
with a confident manner, an open face and  
a firm handshake, he was  
- well into his twenties -  
still not married,  
and still living mainly with his parents.

He had a little room  
all of his own  
at the side of the family house  
right at the back:  
but this was not a good sign for a grown man  
- and an army man at that -  
well past his teens.

Then, quite unexpectedly,  
Roland got 'engaged'.  
Hooray !  
So people were invited round  
to inspect the 'happy couple'.  
And through our garden hedge  
I saw a gathering at a tea table in the bright  
sunshine  
on a patch of grass next to Roland's house.  
The fiancé was there,  
suitably on display, and to me  
she looked passable enough.

Yes she looked okay,  
to me.

But my mother came back and said  
that there was something wrong  
with the girl's legs,  
that they were not right,  
they just weren't  
'nice'.

I imagined they were way too broad in the thigh,  
perhaps far too thick, too fat, and too fleshy;  
and so not a proper bride's legs.  
So perhaps the wedding congregation  
would let out a  
gasp as the poor thing  
stumbled down the aisle, I don't know.  
Would they be able to see  
those horrible legs  
under a wedding dress ?

So deep down  
it was widely understood that Roland,  
with his unsettling military oddness,  
was going to be condemned  
to have to marry something  
with the wrong legs.  
He would have no choice.  
Because a big handsome army man  
shouldn't still be living at home  
into his twenties

as if he were a giant defective.  
The whole thing just wasn't right.  
More to the point, his overall weirdness  
was implicitly understood to be  
somehow curiously demeaning  
to the rest of us.

As it happens, I don't remember how  
this horror story ended.  
I was forced to move out of the family house before  
I became another Roland myself,  
and so he fell off my radar.  
I might have liked to imagine he  
sorted things out, and maybe  
died a hero in a military battle somewhere,  
engaged, this time,  
in military contact with an enemy;  
and married, by this time,  
to someone with something approaching  
the right kind of a body.  
But the fantasy doesn't work  
– it can't work–  
because what's done is done, and  
he would still be the 'poor idiot Roland', and there  
would still be all that business about  
his having lived at home, and about his  
having been forced to put up with  
those legs; and because,  
at the end of the day,  
and short of dementia,

we just can't seem to  
cancel certain categories  
of memory. I only have to  
think of his name to  
have to go through the whole  
bloody thing again.

## Zodiak

Over a breakfast  
of corn flakes,  
damp toast  
a single fried egg  
and metallic tea  
- in the darkened and  
somewhat makeshift  
dining room  
of a very crappy  
but sort of acceptable  
boarding house -

she said that  
the doctor  
had told her  
the mystery illness  
causing her delirium,  
her inner emptiness,  
her swollen breasts and ghostly complexion  
was, in fact,  
'schizophrenia'.

Nice one.

But happily  
she had already worked out  
- for and by herself -  
that all she really just needed was



'more protein' -  
meaning 'another egg' -  
for breakfast.

Later on,  
some years after asking me  
to tell her seriously, no joking,  
whether or not God really existed or not,  
she told me  
that she had been ordained  
an Anglican priestess,  
and was now 'The Reverend'.  
She spoke of 'His will',  
and what 'He'  
had planned for her.

The credo here  
was that you could cure  
something really quite serious  
just by adding an egg  
to your diet.  
You would not need medication,  
or a spell in an asylum,  
or an exorcism.

But as it was,  
the landlady only allowed us  
one egg each per day;  
unless, perhaps,  
you were willing

to pay extra.  
But there turned out to be  
a very real problem  
with the concept of 'extra' here,  
because those who didn't get  
two eggs on their plates  
might well wonder  
what the fuck was going on, and why  
they were being prevented from entering  
the Kingdom of Heaven.

## Textile 'Lotus Rose'

[Terry Waite goes back to Lebanon to  
make nice with his captors.  
They embrace one another, break bread,  
and all is right with the world again.  
Nothing to do, this time, with  
suitcases full of dollars. Nobody  
had to have their better nature  
bought and paid for, did they ?]

Forgiveness is always to some purpose, so  
I need to be 'nicer than you', and in this way  
I get to be Teacher's pet, and maybe you don't,  
because  
being nicer trumps being less nice.  
So, Islamic kidnapper, you're in trouble, long term,  
because,  
as you shall see, your Islamic horribleness  
is going to trip you up, and nicer people will win  
the 'egg and spoon' race in the end.  
Yet nice people  
shouldn't point out horribleness  
to horrible people, or risk becoming  
horrible themselves.  
Mmm. Complicated.  
Not sure who wins, now. Could it be me ?  
Or would it have been nicer for the horrors  
to have tortured poor nice Terry  
to death, so that his niceness

could never be compromised ?  
Hello Freddy Aquinas.  
What price forgiveness then ?  
Is good old nicely bearded Terry the  
horrible one for being so nice ? Maybe  
it should be all about beards instead.  
Terry didn't have  
an Islamic beard, which is not very nice of him,  
him going to  
Lebanon like that, and all.

Anyway - the core message of the Bhagavad Gita  
is that 'a man's got to do what a man's got to do,  
and so you best get on and do it', but  
it's not clear to me  
how it helps anybody to know this.  
Maybe we should just all try to be  
- like Edward Said was -  
altogether more Orientally 'mindful'.  
(Of what ?)

Well, we could start, for a start, with good old  
'cat and mouse'.  
This afternoon one of my cats caught a mouse,  
and had planned - by gamefully flipping it about  
with his paws -  
to torment it to death on the back lawn,  
as is the cat custom.  
I mindlessly intervened, and let  
the mouse escape into

an impenetrable woodpile  
at the back of the garden.  
Then the other cats then  
took up positions nearby,  
and are now waiting patiently, for  
however long it takes,  
for the mouse  
to make a suicidal reappearance.  
For them, and probably for me,  
'a cat's got to do what a cat's got to do,  
and we best let them do it.'  
You want to argue with that ?  
Maybe you do, Johnny Augustine.  
Yet my woodpile is, I believe, many  
hundreds of miles away  
from Lebanon, the Middle East,  
and the Holy Land of Jews.

All I can say in my final judgement  
on the big deal 'Judgement Day',  
- which is imminent, according to  
what's already been revealed -  
is that the next time a good documentary  
on that part of the world  
makes an appearance on one of my screens,  
I may well try to watch it  
- fully mindfulnesslessly -  
just as if I were Edward Said.

# Number Hotel

Early one afternoon

- I was about 10 years old at the time, and  
it must have been a Friday or a Saturday -

I wandered into our family dining room and there,  
sitting quietly at the head of the table,  
all alone

- and in a thick, military-issue grey pullover -  
was Tommy

- from next-door -

on weekend leave from the army.

He must have been calling round

for a cup of tea with us, because

his family were always away, so he had

no one to talk to about soldiering,

or about idiocy,

or about anything else, for that matter.

He was resting his elbows

on the chair armrests, and his hands

were clasped enclosedly in front of him.

But his face was a bright red, almost glowingly hot,

as if he had seen way too much sun,

or something like that.

My mother was bustling about in the background

- making tea and being excitedly busy -

and she came back into the room and began

gushing about Tommy and

'how well he looked'.

I remember her standing behind him  
and resting a hand on his shoulder,  
affectionately, as if well-pleased  
with his soldierly well-lookingness,  
which supposedly confirmed an  
authentic adult masculinity;  
and I remember Tommy turning his head  
towards her, in a kind of nod  
of agreement.

As it was, Tommy didn't have much  
to say for himself that day,  
and in fact I don't actually remember him  
saying anything at all.  
Not a single word.  
He just sat there  
- in his thick pullover-  
in a kind of stolid, self-contained,  
red-faced silence.

I didn't think he looked well; I thought  
he looked well ill. His quietude  
was that of someone right out of sorts,  
and hoping to be spoken to quietly,  
and maybe left alone.  
But my mother didn't want to see any of that,  
and didn't think she needed to  
- what with Tommy being a military army man -  
so Tommy was a 'didn't he look well' Tommy,  
meaning 'doesn't the army

do the boys we send it a world of good !'  
And not yet being able to stand on my own two  
10-year-old non-parade-ground-feet,  
I gave in,  
and sucked this tripe all up – wholesale - as if  
it were real.

A few days later we heard that  
Tommy was in hospital, and that  
whatever it was the army had given him,  
it was serious.

Nothing to see here, you could say. Move along.  
But I just couldn't enjoy this kind of  
'I told you so' turnaround; because it meant  
the people piloting my airship  
knew less than us passengers;  
and probably less even than those  
waving goodbye from  
behind the glass in  
the terminal.

Okay; so for sure, Tommy's still out there  
somewhere, still alive; he didn't die  
from sunstroke or whatever red-faced sick  
seriousness it was he had, but  
I had gutlessly been sold the idea that  
goodness does you good  
- you know it does -  
and that people can read goodie goodness



on your face, even when they can't.  
So today I often ask myself, right out loud,  
'what do I need to know, to know  
what I need to know ?'  
You wish.

## Why do people cliff ?

So the radio in the bedroom upstairs is now playing GG's 'I'm a paedo', though there's no such song, and they wouldn't play it if there was.

Then one day, while watching the lunchtime news about Iraq - featuring an Iraqi official surrounded by jostling journalists, all of them clutching gadgets and notepads - suddenly sliding into full view, and wielding a long pole topped with a huge fluffy grey big dead rat microphone, came bearded Big Peter; the very picture of tanned and sweaty determination, and the very picture of a professional soundman on the job overseas.

But that wasn't the thing. As a freelancer, BP needed to be able to get to where the news was, and get there fast, well before the well-tooled-up teams from the big media companies muscled in and slid him out. So every night he would leave a radio on next to his bed, always tuned to a rolling news service, and have it

quietly chattering away all night,  
every night, forever and ever, so that  
even fast asleep he would be able to hear  
that something terrible had happened,  
and so be able to jump straight out of bed  
and into his car and drive  
to where the action was, his  
big dead rat mike already  
fluffed for action.

The thing about being a professional  
soundman on the job  
overseas is that there is always  
somewhere terrible where  
you can do something.

## Adoration tooth

They don't knock any more, like they used to,  
though once they did.

Often.

I say often, but really I mean only  
a couple of times a year.

Seemed a lot then; seemed to be all the time.

Kids knocking too, ten-year-olds.

Maybe the law changed, or that we have all  
become that much smarter, more streetwise,  
though this is innermost Inner London,  
where they - the 'they' being those who  
aren't so inner city streetwise -

would have us believe that  
any clot arriving from the countryside  
will have their suitcase,  
life savings and any valuables taken off them  
within ten minutes by a  
devious miscreant drifting around,  
lying in wait, and ready to 'assist'  
the brainless country bumpkin  
with their suitcase, and with a  
big brown envelope marked in big letters  
'all my life savings ! handle with care !'  
and with their heirloom valuables sticking  
stupidly out of a big sensible  
country coat tweed jacket pocket.

Really ?

And oh yes if you're a country girl you  
will be knocked up within a  
day or two, and your life ruined, and  
you'll have to go back  
to your parents' mansion in the country,  
where they won't be very happy with you  
at all, now, will they ?  
and so on.

Country girls coming to London from the country  
get knocked up straight away,  
as a rule, is the rule.  
Ah, London,  
when a man is tired of life.

Honestly.

Fast forward a few years.  
A knock at the door, and a girl/woman there  
in broad daylight  
[pointy face, straight hair a bit longer than a bob,  
tracksuit, the kind of girl someone knocked up  
long ago, and now she goes around  
knocking other people up]  
clutching a creased piece of headed paper  
with squares on it for you  
– i.e. me – to write your name on,  
in aid of charity, sponsorship if you like,  
and hand over some hard-earned cash  
for a school up the road which I knew had been

closed down at least ten years earlier (!).  
'Bit hot today' she said, making a whooshing sound  
with her mouth. and  
fanning her face with the creased paper,  
very cunningly putting me at ease,  
and establishing intimacy.  
Yes thanks (as I didn't say to her) ten years ago  
I might well have been dumb enough  
to give you good money for your non-existent  
closed down school  
which, if memory serves,  
so the malicious rumour goes (went)  
was closed down, because  
all the girls there were pretty well out-of-control,  
and on their way to pretty petty criminality  
drug taking, prostitution, and getting knocked up,  
and all the rest of it.

So yes I do still get the occasional knock,  
though my knocked-up girl stories  
are now twenty years old, and counting.  
Surely well out-of-date, having been overtaken  
by an exponential increase in street wisdom.  
The knockers have lanyards now, with names  
and photos and council permits;  
and they all clutch clipboards, and leaflets,  
and have had training at training centres  
in how to chat you up, and how cunningly  
to establish intimacy, and to talk about breasts  
and breast cancer, and the possibility of going deaf.

I guess my sharp faced whippet girl was just  
trying to make some extra cash in hand,  
on the side, for drugs, or drink, or phone calls,  
or a day trip back to the country.  
Most likely she was an ex-pupil from  
the closed down school,  
otherwise how did she get hold of  
that headed paper ?

## \$25 dry

I once saw a documentary  
about how the police investigate murders,  
and about how even an observant beginner can  
tell a huge amount about a crime scene  
from what they can 'crime see' right there  
in front of them,  
without having to rely on years of  
forensic training.

So there was this grey haired old woman  
lying face down on a floor at the end  
of a long corridor upstairs in  
an old wooden Victorian house,  
with the back of her skull  
badly bashed well in, and  
her arms stretched out above her, hands  
palm down - in surrender, if you like - and  
her head turned very slightly  
towards her shoulder.

And so the detective said 'Okay Jim,  
you can see straightaway  
there are no defensive wounds  
on her arms or on her hands, so she did not  
put up any kind of a fight; and  
we can see her head is turned ever so  
slightly towards us, so her arms  
were only out to break her fall, and



then she turned to see who  
it was had struck her, and  
when she saw that, she gave up, and  
did nothing to stop them, which means that  
whoever it was, doing the attack,  
they were already known to her, and  
she just let them go ahead.'

Eventually they arrested the husband, and  
sure enough, it was him (!).  
Done and dusted and crime scene solved, in one.  
And it all makes for a fun angle  
- doesn't it -  
on life and how we live it,  
going forward, if you'll  
give it a moment.

Because there comes a time -  
often not so very far away from where  
we are right now - when  
you are going to die anyway,  
so why bother fighting for a life which is very  
nearly over. So why fight,  
and maybe even win (!), and then have to put up  
with having to think about  
the fact that someone you know sexually intimately  
and in every other intimate way  
tried to kill you, even if  
that intimate someone is now banged up  
nicely securely

as an intimate inmate  
in a prison or in a mental hospital,  
on an attempted murder charge. Isn't it altogether  
that much nicer and easier and more sensible  
and more intimate  
just to surrender to events and  
let them take their own  
bastard sensibly senseless course.

Okay Jim, think about it. She's gone,  
and she's done with him,  
and done with their one long life together,  
whatever it was like,  
good, bad, neither or all three;  
but he hasn't, and he still has to  
live with the thought  
of her, and of what  
he did to get to where  
he is right now, which is  
where, exactly.

Where.

And even if murder  
doesn't bother him,  
- it didn't seem to -  
I sort of think  
she wins.

## Distaff

'Vassil'

- from India of all places -  
drove a smart new BMW,  
but this didn't stop him from  
wearing colourful long pants  
that always ended some inches  
above his shoes,  
and it made him look so  
wilfully unaware  
you had to suspect he might be  
just a tiny bit  
stupid.

And as part of a charity promotion  
Vassil stuck a big plastic red clown nose  
to the grille on the front of his car,  
and left it there,  
indefinitely.

As it was,  
Vassil liked to portray himself as  
a specialist bookseller,  
- selling to rich customers  
all over the world -  
though he never made  
any money,  
and was widely believed  
- round and about the neighbourhood -

to be struggling with debt.  
And through a predicable process of attrition  
- having tried everyone else already -  
I ended up as probably his last 'friend'  
in the whole world,  
as I had no money whatsoever  
I could lend him.

So he once tried  
teaching me a bit of German  
in the street, thinking – I think –  
it might enhance  
his reputation, and establish  
a serviceable bond between us.  
We did the days of the week.  
They took about ten minutes.  
He told me Mittwoch  
was Wednesday and that Mittwoch  
meant 'mid-week'.  
Something warned me this might well be  
just about all German he knew.  
But I didn't mind.  
It was both delightful and charming  
to imagine that he was seriously trying  
to teach me an entire living language  
this way.

Later came a time when  
the German wife and  
the half-German-Indian daughters

- all still cooped up in the same house -  
had had enough of Vassil,  
and told him to go.  
No way of knowing exactly what  
led up to that decisive moment  
- maybe it was those stupid pants -  
but as I saw for myself,  
his family liked to pretend he didn't exist,  
and would cut him dead in the street.  
No doubt the debts had slipped  
out of control, forcing him into  
an unseemly and incestuous 'borrowing'.  
It happens.  
It does.  
I've had to do it myself.  
'I'm all fucked-up' I heard him say  
to anyone listening  
as he stood very unsteadily in a queue of  
impoverished jokers like myself  
at the checkout of  
our local late-night supermarket:  
'All fucked-up.'  
He was buying himself a half of whisky  
- as well he might -  
and I  
- as well I might -  
was going for cans of 10% strength beer.  
And that was that.  
I never saw him again.  
Vassil was gone.

Years later still,  
at traffic lights in South London somewhere,  
I happened to see the German wife  
sitting alone behind the wheel  
of Vassil's BMW.  
Doubtless it was never really his car  
in the first place.  
Maybe they weren't even  
his pants.  
I forgot to check  
for the 'all-fucked-up'  
red clown nose, but  
doubtless Frau Vassil had already  
ripped it off and  
thrown it away.

## The dog lung

A group of 'concerned elders' –  
I don't remember how many;  
at least three, maybe more -had invited  
Glen out for a meal, 'somewhere local', so that  
the group of them could have an important chat.  
These guys were all senior members of  
his Scottish Presbyterian church,  
and they ended up at a West Indian restaurant  
in Wandsworth High Street,  
which was an unusual choice, given  
the kind of people we're talking about; but  
what must have happened was that they had  
left the choice with Glen; and he, not reading  
the situation properly – as always - had chosen  
somewhere 'interesting' to go to,  
thinking instinctively that he would  
get generous helpings of spicy food  
all to himself for free (forgetting  
that he wasn't going to be paying anyway)  
and just as instinctively going for  
'cheap and plentiful', even  
when he didn't need to. But maybe  
there was nowhere else for them to go –  
there being very few  
restaurants of any description  
in the High Street at the time, so  
it was West Indian, or nothing.

Nothing.

Once they had taken their seats and studied the menu, they asked Glen what he was planning to do with his life, now that he had finished university (with a very poor degree). Glen said he wanted to be a school teacher. He already had some ideas, in this regard, and had already spoken to some people. But the 'leader' of the delegation shook his head and said 'We don't see it.' Meaning that they didn't think Glen had either the talent or the necessary discipline for school teaching. Meaning also that it had already been decided that Glen needed a good 'taking in hand' if he was not to go astray, and disgrace himself, and let the church down. Glen said nothing, meaning not that he agreed with them, but that he wasn't in a position to argue.

I don't know how they moved the conversation on after that; I can't imagine what you would say next. But they would surely have found ways to emphasise - again and again - that they only had Glen's 'best interests at heart'.



After the meal, the men – and I love this image –  
walked Glen to a house nearby, (where exactly ?)  
and once inside, asked him to take a good look  
at a wide selection of second-hand suits –  
unfashionably grim jackets and pants  
bought from local charity shops –  
which were displayed on wire hangers  
about the walls -  
the idea being that Glen would take these suits  
away with him and so help himself  
to get somewhere  
in life.

Now the problem was, Glen always thought  
of himself as perfectly presentable, and  
never less than ‘well turned out’  
- and though this was absurdly untrue, as  
most of the time he looked grubby and unkempt  
and confused with it -  
the idea that someone could have had  
the fucking gall to present him with  
an array of polyester charity suits was,  
to Glen, not only a thoughtless affront, much worse,  
it was a total misjudgment of his  
essential ontological righteousness,  
- his God-worthiness -  
and therefore something he could just not let pass.  
It called for a genuine ‘moment in time’  
rather than the anticipated

effusive gratitude.

So he told me he  
lost control of himself completely, and began  
ranting and raving and gesticulating, and  
swinging his arms about in wind-milling circles,  
and screaming propositional statements about  
Nazi death camps and the Soviet Union, and  
then about surgical appliances  
and medical malpractice, and then  
about scientific falsifiability and feminine hygiene,  
and although I couldn't follow a single word of it  
- you really didn't need to -  
I much enjoyed the thought of these well-meaning  
godly worthies having to stand there  
- stunned and alarmed and utterly confounded -  
and wondering what the fuck in heaven  
had just happened.

## Book of Marmalady

There was a narrow stretch of sand  
- twenty yards maybe -  
between two clumps of rocks, where  
you had to put your towel and your beach stuff  
if you didn't want to hire  
one of the overpriced sun loungers and deck chairs  
set in simple rows a bit further back.

And above the beach, the one and only taverna,  
owned and run by a  
big wide physical 'pretending to be friendly'  
middle-aged Greek guy who  
you could easily see would be difficult to subdue  
in a brawl if it ever came to that, but it was  
never going to, because he knew that he  
looked and sounded  
faintly menacing - in casual kind of way - and so  
he thought he might try to  
offload tainted wine on me, and then,  
by walking back to his  
station across the room, and leaning  
casually against the counter there,  
protect himself by making  
friendly chat.

I tried sipping the wine a few times, but it smelt of  
something industrial like paraffin,  
or maybe turpentine, and was

undrinkable.  
So I asked the big man  
for a different glass,  
and got one.

Outside, in the sunshine, beyond the beach and  
over a deep channel of cold-water sea  
- only nicely warm at the edges, near the beach -  
lay the low peak of a barren island,  
a sharp triangular lump of  
brown, dry, sunbaked, rock.  
Being 'just over there', as it were,  
I thought I could swim out to it; it seemed  
both quite close as well as interestingly far away.  
Say half a mile distant.  
It would be a kind of  
innocent holiday challenge,  
as I saw it,  
for me personally.

Most times the sea in this channel, even  
in the deepest part in the middle, looked clear  
and easy to swim;  
on other days, maybe to do with  
a fresh breeze blowing,  
it looked dark and unfriendly.  
I thought back to when I was being taught,  
at the age of five, how to swim,  
and how for me swimming lessons  
then, and now, equated

with being unable to breathe, and  
of being pulled underwater, and of  
being drowned, and of people  
wanting me to be drowned.

I don't know about the rock island.  
There would surely have been  
hostile currents in the middle of the channel,  
the water being very deep there,  
and reaching it being just about the time  
you got tired, and so when you looked down,  
you wouldn't be able to see  
anything underneath you, because  
the dark blue water would  
have turned black by then, and then  
you would start to think that you  
might not have the strength to  
get to the other side, and that,  
even if you did, and even after a long rest in the  
wind and sun,  
you would still somehow have to  
swim back, and that  
swimming back would be ten times harder than  
swimming across, and there would be that nagging  
sensation of somehow being pulled downwards,  
and of not being able to breathe.

I asked the big man if I might be allowed to  
swim the channel leading to the island  
but he said definitely no, because it would mean

crossing the shipping lane.

He judged me to be weak and soft, and  
financially worthless,  
which is why he thought  
he could give me a  
glass of industrialised cast-off piss poison  
to drink for lunch.

## Hello unboiling

A family wedding, though  
not in a normal mainstream church this time,  
like Anglican or Presbyterian or Methodist,  
but in a respectable evangelical cult venue;  
and in a respectable church building, with  
everyone dressed up as normal, in normal clothes,  
but the building, pitched roof like a church,  
deliberately undecorated and  
unmystically unmysterious  
- no horrible crucifixions -  
and though solemnly functional, was  
fresh and white-walled and modern, and  
designed to give off  
a sense of freshness, and unfustiness, and  
perhaps, yes,  
uncreepiness as well.  
Fine.  
I'm okay with all that.

'Tom' was to officiate,  
and act as a priest.  
Tom was young and unfusty and uncreepy  
and informal, and  
good-looking in a deadly boring fresh-faced  
Christian way; and he  
represented the new order of Christian cult  
respectability, and  
Christian cult orthodoxy - which could take on the

establishment and 'out-establishment'ise' them  
for respectability and orthodoxy –  
while being young and informal and  
respectable and  
yes, more than anything else, capably boringly  
good-looking with it.  
The whole deal refreshingly and  
freshly fresh.

So Tom took us through the ceremonials, none of  
which I remember  
- I was just a kid, for christsake -  
though I do remember his capable informality,  
and I do remember a very wordy section of  
informal but serious wedding advice, dressed up as  
the simple facts of how best to do  
marital relationships,  
and how to get on with one another maritally, and  
get on in a way which sounded  
obvious, in a way, to all those who were filled up  
with the simple and obvious Christian goodness  
that came with being a member  
of this respectably sensible cult church.  
All very informally plain and simple and  
somewhat dull, though pleasantly and boringly  
obvious.

Come to think of it, Tom must have been  
a licensed priest of a sort, to have  
officiated as he did; unless



you didn't need a licence to do  
what he did. Don't know the  
answer to that.

But of course the problem is not Tom, now,  
nor was it then: the problem lay  
elsewhere.

Tom, and the rest of them, the church members,  
(and also us, if you're honest)  
had (or have) life all wrapped up:  
they had themselves, and their religion,  
and their righteousness, and with it  
a rulebook for all of life,  
so were able to do the right thing  
in every possible single simple circumstance,  
and never go wrong, because  
the rules - plain and simple - were really  
not all that hard, either to understand, or,  
so to speak,  
to follow.

Then, sometime later, suddenly, mysteriously,  
unforeseen and out of nowhere,  
skidding wheels screeching ! bang ! crash !  
- a car accident, on a major highway:  
people banged and crashed up a bit,  
Tom and his wife among them,  
but no one so seriously injured, nothing  
that a few weeks rest and recovery and bandages  
and humble self-reflection

couldn't cure.

So what was that all about, then, that crash,  
people might have thought,  
if they thought anything at all,  
though I don't remember  
anyone thinking anything through,  
though they must have done  
- they must have done -  
on the quiet.

The crash wasn't about anything, it was  
just a sudden car accident, a shock, something  
unforeseen,  
could happen to anyone, anytime,  
you never know. Could be  
you next.

Then, years after that, Tom, again,  
in middle age by now,  
went and did something unbelievably  
strange and unbelievably unexpected:  
he disappeared – bang and crashed off,  
if you like - to Greece (!)  
with a girlfriend no-one knew he had (!),  
supposedly to start a  
whole new life, and supposedly to  
'pick olives' for a living, in  
the glorious Greek sunshine.  
Skinny-dipping at dawn; chicken souvlaki  
with lemon for lunch,

whitewash-walled red-tiled cottage  
on the beach, that kind of thing.  
Marvellous ! Amazing !  
That's a shock, even at the level  
of the kind of endless and worthless  
semi-spiritual bunkum  
we were all accustomed to.

Then nothing, for a while.  
Nothing. Radio silence. Zip.  
Best not think about Tom, was  
the sense, at the time.  
Blot it all out, all of it.  
Then Tom back again -minus  
the girlfriend no one knew  
he had - and very much hoping to  
pick up, sort of, right where  
he left off.  
Kind of another afterthought  
aftershock, this; that,  
in its own way.  
Wife wouldn't take him back, we heard,  
so he must have tried that one on;  
nice thought, Tom.

But returning to the wedding for a moment  
- all those years earlier -  
what are we supposed to do  
with our memories of Tom's  
homely homily; that is,

with all that holy homespun advice  
we'd been given ?

Okay, so those were 'them days' when  
people claimed they used to leave  
their front doors unlocked, sure,  
and everyone used to leave keys of all sorts safely  
all over the place, and  
you knew who your neighbours thought  
they knew who they were. (!)  
Okay, then, so now 'divorce'  
- which was totally forbidden - no exceptions - in  
Tom's Christian evangelical cult church,  
though the place was riddled  
- on the quiet - with divorced people,  
- all the way to the top, and especially there -  
including now, presumably,  
Tom, the bogus priest himself, and his  
dumbfuck braindead ex-wife (!) (jesus, give her a  
break, you heartless bastard) with their  
front doors unlocked, and  
no keys of their own, and all the  
souvlaki tavernas full up, so nowhere  
else for them to rest  
their sorry-ass heads.

## Eye to keep

So like Burt Lancaster  
In 'The Swimmer',  
I somehow expected to have to swim walk  
the long five miles back home  
- on my own -  
in the rain or in  
the sunshiny rain,  
and then to  
have to face up to  
a boarded up and  
abandoned  
and probably  
uninhabitable  
building.

Interestingly,  
I don't remember now  
how I got back  
that day. I have no memory  
of the drive home that  
there must have been.

When I tell people all this  
they commend me on my 'honesty'  
but they don't know what I'm talking about,  
because  
- honestly -  
this is not about honesty.

I had kids late in life  
long after everyone else  
- along with everything else -  
and they came at a time when  
- late in life -  
everyone else had moved on  
to other things.

Then one day  
in a home improvement superstore,  
with a brother-in-law  
and his kids and my kids  
and maybe some other kids  
all mixed together  
in a big gang of multiple kids -  
he organising the stuff for me that other people had  
already bought decades earlier,  
and then me standing there seeing all of them  
from a good twenty yards away  
coaxing a laden trolley towards the checkout  
it suddenly seemed to me that  
none of these kids  
including those designated by convention as 'mine'  
had really anything to do with me,  
and that my kids  
- despite the convention -  
somehow probably properly belonged  
to someone else altogether;  
and that the truth was I had somehow

been pushed over into  
someone else's world.

And then

I heard the brother-in-law  
shout a confident command  
to the whole bunch of them, at which,  
- without missing a beat -  
they then all  
- still swarming about the loaded trolley -  
and without bothering for a moment  
even to turn to look for me  
headed off to the carpark, the kids  
shouting and laughing and  
pushing one another about playfully.

But maybe this isn't about kids.  
Maybe it's really all about that  
home improvement stuff  
piled high in that trolley, and  
destined, uselessly and inexplicably,  
for that  
uninhabitable place  
miles away,  
arrived at only  
after a long walk alone  
in the swimming rain.



## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jakob Zaaiman is an artist and writer living in London. He writes prose fiction as well as poetry, and he likes to create works that defy easy explanation. He has also written extensively on modern contemporary art.





# KING JANE GERMANY

**Jakob Zaaïman**

Poems for those who find almost all poetry  
- including the classics - repulsively wordy  
& inconsequential, & who have long ago  
decided that there are more interesting things  
in life than the musings of the hikikomori.

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living and working in London.  
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and he likes to create works which defy  
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**POETRY**